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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [ML](#)

SUBJECT: POLICE OFFER TO PROVIDE SECURITY TO UNION LEADERS

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER GLENN FEDZER FOR REASON 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: Leaders of the National Union of Higher Education (SNESUP), who have accused Minister of Education Mamadou Lamine Traore of attempts at intimidation during their month-long strike, were pleasantly surprised by a local police offer of enhanced security for strike leaders. While disturbing SNESUP allegations, including of a staged traffic accident that nearly killed one member, remain wholly un-corroborated, the attitude of security forces is no doubt a refreshing change of pace for organized labor in West Africa. End summary.

¶2. (C) Union leaders Doctor Amadou Malle and Professor Djibonding Dembele have claimed Minister of Education Mamadou Lamine Traore is behind several unspecified attempts at intimidation since they went on strike on November 27. Malle, SNESUP's Secretary General, also blamed Traore for a December 2 incident in which he claims a man on a motorbike (a pervasive menace in Bamako's turbulent local transportation scene) followed him from his home and tried to run him over the side of a bridge crossing the Niger river.

¶3. (U) SNESUP, an umbrella organization representing the over 1000 professors and researchers working in the University of Mali system, say three major points of dispute have been under discussion since July: A housing allowance or subsidy; the annulment of final exams given to 13,000 law students in the summer of 2006 by interim administrators after the regular faculty departed for annual leave; and the organization of new exams that "respect professional norms." After promises of innovative housing programs to supplement staff salaries failed to materialize after five months of negotiations, SNESUP moved to strike.

¶6. (U) Malle said his members are still angry over final exams given to 13,000 students in June, after the end of the regular academic year. The late exam schedule was a response to student strikes that had pushed the student calendar ahead of the professor's normal stopping point; the professors went home, and an interim management team from the Ministry of Education then decided to offer final exams. Malle claimed that the test was given unprofessionally, that many students cheated or paid the ad hoc proctors bribes, and that the results, if allowed to stand, would undermine the credibility of a Malian academic diploma.

¶7. (C) Dembele had assumed a summons to the local police station December 8th was part of an intimidation campaign, and was "shocked" that the police offered to help with the security of union leaders. According to Dembele, the police had heard rumors that Dembele and Malle might be at some risk, and wanted to make sure they had enough protection. Dembele believing the police were sincere in their offer.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: SNESUP's strike gives a picture of what drives Malian labor activities--and in this case how these

activities disrupt higher education. Mali's academic sector has been plagued by student and teacher strikes for years, and it appears that the system will lose another half year if the government fails to settle. The government is unlikely to re-test 13,000 students to keep 1000 professors happy, but may offer SNESUP some of the cash they demand, especially to settle the strike in an election year. Malle's accusation against the Minister of Education is unsubstantiated - and indeed, Bamako's traffic has terrorizing ability in its own spontaneous right. Nevertheless, we find the police offer and the (albeit surprised) confidence SNESUP's leaders expressed in the security forces to be a refreshing reminder of the sense of fair play taking root in Mali's democratic institutions.

McCulley